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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHMFIS/ECOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

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RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY

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RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH// PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU PRIORITY

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000063

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TAGS: PGOV PTER PREL TU IZ

SUBJECT: TURKEY: PKK DEMOBILIZATION IN THE SPOTLIGHT

REF: ANKARA 2935

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The idea of an amnesty as part of a comprehensive plan to deal with the PKK issue is under broad discussion in Turkey (reftel). Suggesting leniency, even for PKKers without blood on their hands, poses political risks. But for Turkey to resolve this decades-old insurgency, it must demobilize and reintegrate some 5,000 PKKers into society. Kurds in the southeast, many of whom have boys in the mountains, see no other alternative. Many in the Turkish establishment also recognize amnesty as a necessary evil. The Turkish military remains officially hostile towards amnesty, but they better than anyone know the conflict cannot be resolved by force alone.

¶2. (C) Over the last 20 years, the GOT has introduced several "repentance" offers which brought about 1,900 PKK fighters down from the mountains; hundreds of others have fled the PKK to Europe or Iraq. The current GOT recognizes there are reasons why previous initiatives had only limited success and know a new version will need to go beyond previous programs. End summary.

Confronting the "Amnesty" Taboo

¶3. (C) Kurdish leaders in Turkey's southeast believe finding a means to demobilize the PKK's estimated 5,000 fighters, most of whom are in the mountains of southeastern Turkey and Northern Iraq, is the key to peace in the region. GUNSIAD (an influential regional business association in the Southeast) President Sahismail Bedirhanoglu told us that some form of amnesty is essential because thousands of families have relatives in the hills.

¶4. (C) In western Turkey, the issue of amnesty has largely been taboo; no politician can afford to appear soft on the PKK or separatism. National Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahceli represents this approach when he accuses those who consider amnesty as dishonoring the many soldiers who have died fighting the PKK.

¶5. (C) Many Turks would ultimately support a solution that ended the violence, preserved Turkey's territorial integrity and avoided the perception that the state had caved in to terrorism. At this juncture, they are reluctant to say so

publicly. An amnesty initiative would stand the best chance of success if introduced in the context of other measures addressing legal recognition of Kurds' identity, cultural/linguistic rights and economic development.

Treacherous Political Waters

¶6. (C) Amnesty is the Bermuda Triangle of Turkish politics -- it's a dangerous issue bounded by three mutually suspicious institutions: a powerful, yet insecure governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) that wants to resolve the Kurdish issue; the military, which fears giving too much ground to Kurds' political aspirations (and loathes the thought of handing AKP a domestic victory); and the Kurds' own dysfunctional politics.

¶7. (C) On December 9, PM Erdogan said he was working with the military on a "new initiative" to persuade those in the mountains to return home. It was the first of a number of trial balloons. The PM noted that past amnesty efforts had not achieved the desired results. He was prepared to try again after examining where those efforts had fallen short. In November, government spokesman/deputy PM Cemil Cicek acknowledged the political dangers but has since been tasked with proposing how best to "expand" the current version, Turkish Penal Code Article 221.

¶8. (C) Privately and publicly, the military leadership acknowledges that solving the Kurdish issue requires an integrated approach, combining the use of force with social, economic and political policies. Land Forces commander Ilker Basbug (next in line to be CHOD), went out on a limb in 2006

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when he said publicly that military measures were insufficient and referred to the need to "pardon" young PKKers who do not have blood on their hands. Other TGS leaders are less forthcoming.

Find the Right Words

¶9. (C) In Turkey, the term amnesty implies a government pardon for crimes (and is used regularly to commute the sentences of "ordinary" criminals). The term "repentance" raises hackles of its own. Turkey's repentance laws, introduced for defined periods between 1985 and 2003, resulted in the surrender of some 1,900 fighters. These laws required those turning themselves in to provide intelligence to the authorities. This approach never won the approval of the PKK leadership and exposed the beneficiaries to reprisals from their former comrades.

Options

¶10. (C) Several ideas on demobilization may be considered:

--A phased approach: In 1993, President Turgut Ozal reportedly was considering a three-tiered amnesty proposal under which rank-and-file volunteers who had not committed acts of violence would be allowed to rejoin society immediately; middle-ranking fighters would be given amnesty after two years and senior leaders (including Ocalan, at large at the time) would need to wait five years. Ozal died before acting on the proposal. Such an approach, which could not include Ocalan, would maintain leverage over time on the PKK and guarantee that it adheres to promises to disband.

--Expand Penal Code Article 221: AKP passed this law in 2003. Its downfall is the requirement that those who wish to turn themselves in must inform on their former PKK colleagues. Numerous contacts, including AKP and opposition Republic People's Party officials with roots in the Southeast have told us this is what makes the current provision most

repugnant. If the GOT expands on the existing provision, it would likely remove the requirement to "inform" and allow those who wish to benefit -- cadres without blood on their hands -- to undergo a streamlined judicial proceeding.

--Go to Europe: Some, including AKP Diyarbakir MP Ihsan Arslan, favor allowing the core PKK leadership to go into permanent exile in Europe. The GOT would, Arslan said, need to close its eyes to this, but it would help rid them of the problem in northern Iraq and keep many PKK ring-leaders abroad. This has been a de facto demobilization method for many years as hundreds of PKK members have escaped the organization and now live in Iraq or Europe.

Conclusion

¶11. (C) The coming months provide an opportunity to achieve historic progress on Turkey's Kurdish issue. The AKP, resoundingly re-elected in July and bolstered by recent limited cross border operations in northern Iraq, has the political capital to pursue a comprehensive approach. Additional law-enforcement pressure on the PKK organization can put the GOT in an even stronger position. But without a successful demobilization, a majority of Kurds will doubt that the GOT is sincere about solving the problem. It is one crucial piece of a comprehensive GOT strategy that must include economic incentives, enhanced rights (i.a., through a revised constitution), political risk taking, considerable vision and the support of Turkey's friends.

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